NEW
NICK CARTER
WEEKLY

Issued Weekly. By Subscription $2.50 per year. Entered as Second Class Matter at New York Post Office by STREET & SMITH, 238 William St., N. Y.

No. 410. Price, Five Cents.

INEZ, THE MYSTERIOUS
OR THE MASTER CRIMINAL'S MASCOT

Inez understood that somebody was concealed behind the couch, and that the revolver used as a club was about to descend upon his head with crushing force, and she looked toward Carruthers with an air of satisfaction, as he raised his hand to strike.

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INEZ, THE MYSTERIOUS;

OR,

The Master Criminal's Mascot.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

THE MASTER CRIMINAL'S ESCAPE.

An almost unprecedented thing had happened in the career of the great detective, Nick Carter; he had taken a whole month of solid rest.

In order to accomplish that remarkable feat, he had packed his bag and gone away quietly among the mountains where he could lie all day in his hammock, or, with a fishing rod or gun, wander along the brooks or through the woods, alone and untroubled by the throbbing pulse of the busy world around him.

During that month he had kept himself entirely out of touch with the world. He had not received or sent a message or a letter of any kind, to any person. In fact, he had not informed even his trusted assistant, Chick, of his address, so that in reality he was as much out of the world, and away from existence, as it is possible for a live man to get.

Neither had he seen a paper during that time.

And now that vacation was ended.

He arrived in the city of New York by way of the night boat from Albany, and stepped from the gang plank to the wharf soon after six o'clock in the morning of a bright and beautiful day.

"Old New York looks rather good to a fellow after he has been away from it for a month," he soliloquized while he strode rapidly to his car and was borne swiftly toward his home.

It was seven o'clock when he arrived there, and he

found Chick seated on the steps, smoking his after-breakfast cigar.

"Hello, Chick," he said, cordially; "aren't you up rather early this morning?"

"I haven't been to bed," replied Chick, shaking him affectionately by the hand. "And, besides that, something in my inner consciousness told me that you were about due to arrive this morning, so I was sitting here waiting for you, I expect."

"Not been to bed? Is there something doing, Chick?"

"Well, I should smile."

"What is it?"

"Morris Carruthers has escaped again."

"The deuce he has!"

"Sure thing, Nick."

"When?"

"The day before yesterday."

"How?"

"Just walked out of the court room, where his trial was taking place."

"Escaped from the court room? It seems almost incredible."

"Well, you would find that it sounded mighty credible if you should take an afternoon excursion among those court officers who are responsible for his getting away. They are like a lot of honey bees when there is a black bear fooling around the hive."

"Busy, eh?"

"I should say so; but it is all buzz; there doesn't seem to be a stinger in the crowd."

"How did Carruthers work it, Chick?"

"Why, he made use of a trick that is so old and worn out that nobody ever guessed what was going on until they came to their senses and discovered that Carruthers had evaporated. He just rose in his place, took his hat and walked out, before the eyes of the crowd in the court room, and, as far as I am able to determine, there wasn't a soul who saw him, save, of course, his confederates."

"But you haven't told me how he did it."

"Nobody knows exactly how he did it. The court had been engaged a week in selecting a jury to try him, and that part of the case was completed the evening of the day before his escape; so, you see, the actual trial of the case had begun that morning.

"The district attorney had completed his opening speech, and was on the point of calling his first witness to the stand when the judge announced recess, and the court room, which had been packed, was partially cleared. Still, there were many who remained in their seats—who had, in fact, brought their luncheons with them, fearing that if they relinquished their seats to go out, they would not be able to secure them again."

"There was a large attendance, eh?"

"The largest I ever saw in a court room. Carruthers is such a handsome rascal, and the young woman who sat as near to him as they would permit, was so beautiful——"

"A young woman! Who was that, Chick?"

"I don't know, Nick, unless it was the girl who tried to wing you with a pistol shot, the night you arrested Carruthers."*

"Inez," said Nick. "I never did take the trouble to find out her last name."

"Well, as I was saying," continued Chick, "Carruthers is so handsome and—we will call her Inez—she was so beautiful, that after the first day in the court room the papers expatiated upon it all to such an extent that the place was simply packed by men and women both."

"The men went there to see Inez, and the women, to see Carruthers."

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*See No. 409 of the NICK CARTER WEEKLY, "The Carruthers Puzzle." Readers are also recommended to read Nos. 407 and 408, respectively entitled "A Bank President's Plot," and "The Master Criminal."—ED.

"Exactly that. And they fought to get inside. Hundreds were turned away. It was a mob."

"I see. Well, go on."

"When the judge declared recess, the room partly cleared out, and, of course, the prisoner was taken back across the 'bridge of sighs' to the tombs."

"Of course."

"Well, the young woman, Inez, remained in her seat when Carruthers was taken away. She had done that every day since the beginning of the case. While the court was in session, she kept her veil raised so that her exquisite face revealed every line of its wonderful beauty, but the moment court adjourned, it had been her habit to drop her veil, and to sit with her head resting on her hand until the judge returned again to the bench."

"Was she permitted to sit close to the prisoner?"

"Yes. I don't know why, but it seems that the rules were stretched a little in her case. Probably he brought some outside influence to bear. At all events, she was permitted to sit beside him."

"I think I see through the game now, Chick."

"Doubtless. However, let me finish."

"Go ahead."

"When one o'clock came, people began to file into the court room again. The adjournment was until one-fifteen."

"Were you there, Chick?"

"No; I was not. I'd bet a ten-spot, if I had been there Carruthers wouldn't have got away without one pair of eyes seeing him go."

"So would I, Chick. But go on with your story."

"You know the judge always comes in last. He waits until the court room gets partially settled down before he makes his appearance."

"Yes."

"So do the officers who bring in the prisoner. They come in from one side of the court room and the judge from the other."

"Yes."

"And when the prisoner has been brought in and placed in his seat, then the judge stalks into the room. Then all around the room, the court officers rap with their knuckles and call out in bull-of-Bashan voices, 'Hats off! Hats off! Order in the court!'"

"Yes, yes. But why all these details, Chick? I know all that already."

"I'm working up to the climax—just as Carruthers and his confederates did; see?"

"Sure. Go on."

"Well, the prisoner was in his chair beside Inez. She had turned to him and appeared to be talking. Three officers were grouped around him. Two of his attorneys were close beside him. Two of the assistant district attorneys were near at hand. The court room was buzzing. The judge appeared. The officers rapped with their knuckles upon tables and against the backs of chairs and benches. They called out from all over the room, 'Hats off! Hats off! Order in the court!'"

"You give a good description, Chick. I can see it all."

"And just as they shouted, 'Order in the court!' a woman near the door let out a shriek which would have awakened the dead, almost. Did I say a shriek? She kept on shrieking and yelling, and at the same time fighting to get out of the room. In an instant there was almost a riot, there by the door. The woman kept on shrieking. Men ran toward her. Blows were struck, and there was a hubbub which would have reminded you of an election riot. See?"

"Yes; I see."

"When that first shriek came, every eye in the court room was turned in that direction. A hundred people probably stood on their chairs or on the benches, to

get a view of what was taking place. Officers from every part of the room rushed toward that door. The judge hammered with his gavel as if he were breaking stones up at Sing Sing himself."

"Sure! I can almost see it and hear it."

"So I suppose there were two or three minutes—maybe five—when nobody thought a word about the prisoner."

"Likely enough."

"And when they did think about him, he seemed to be still seated in his chair, next to the young woman, Inez; that is, all they could see of him appeared to be the same man. His clothes were the same pattern and cut, his hair was the same color; but he was sitting with his face buried in his hands."

"But it wasn't Carruthers at all, eh?"

"Wait. When the noise partially ceased, and the officers and people in the court room began to regain their senses—when the officers who had immediate charge of the prisoner made a move nearer to him, the man in the prisoner's chair leaped to his feet, turned and faced the court room, and acted as if he were frightened almost to death.

"One glance at him was enough. Everybody in that room saw in a flash that the man was not Carruthers—saw that he did not even resemble him.

"And then, to cap it all, Inez also sprang to her feet. For an instant she gazed on the face of the man who had taken Carruthers' place, and then she shrieked, and fainted away.

"All the same, Nick, Carruthers had disappeared."

CHAPTER II.

AS SMART AS A STEEL TRAP.

"I suppose there was another riot after that," said Nick, smiling.

"Well, something approaching it, I think. I wasn't there, but from what I hear——"

"Did Inez really faint, or was she shamming?"

"I asked that question, too."

"What's the answer?"

"If she did not really faint away she acted the part so well that nobody there could tell the difference. A doctor managed to crowd his way to her after a moment or two, and she was beginning to come around when he reached her, so he couldn't swear to it one way or the other."

"Did they arrest her?"

"Sure thing. But they couldn't hold her. There wasn't a scintilla of evidence to show that she knew a thing about it. She swore she had never seen the man who took Carruthers' place before in her life, and he swore he had never seen her or Carruthers before that day."

"And her conduct that day had been the same that it was every other day since the trial began."

"Precisely. There wasn't a string to hold her by and she was sent home."

"But she was shadowed?"

"Oh, yes. The inspector put one of his best men onto her, and as soon as I heard about the affair, I let Patsy loose on her track."

"Good! Now about the man. What did they do with him?"

"He's under arrest; but they can't hold him."

"Can't prove a thing, eh?"

"Not a thing."

"What was his story?"

"Just the most natural one in the world. He said he hadn't been inside the court room, or the building, before that day—in fact, he swore positively that he had never been in the city of New York in his life until that morning, but having read about the great master criminal, as the papers have called Carruthers, and that his trial had begun, he determined to take a trip to New York in order to see him, and to hea

much of the trial as he could in the space of two
ys, for, he said, that was all the time he had to
ıre from his farm."

"A farmer, eh?"

"Yes; from the east end of Long Island, somewhere
ar Greenport, I believe."

"Have they looked him up?"

"Yes; and he told the truth. He is a farmer. He
s live where he said. He has always lived there,
l, if he has been in New York before, his neighbors
ı't know it."

"Have you seen him?"

"No."

"The circumstance is a little too remarkable, how-
r, for his story to be the absolute truth, isn't it?"

"Well, rather."

"But they still hold him?"

"Yes; only he's got a lawyer, and he is to be up
writ of habeas corpus this morning at ten. They
hold him any longer than that."

"Probably not. How does he explain being in the
oner's chair?"

"He doesn't try to explain it, more than to say that
as never inside of a city court room before in his
and that he supposed one chair was as good as
er. His story is to the effect that he wandered
the court room and wandered around it just as he
l do in a court of the justice of the peace, in his
town. He found that vacant chair, 'way up in
—a good seat, as he supposed, to see and hear.
aid he was standing and looking around the room
ı he heard the shrieks, and they frightened him,
e dropped into the chair and covered his face and
with his hands. Now, wouldn't that jar you?"

"Yes; but how can you deny its truth?"

"That is just the point. The whole thing is so
le that you can't."

"What I don't understand, Chick, is how the pris-
oner's chair happened to be where anybody who
pleased could get at it. Where was the prisoner's
dock?"

"Ripped out. They have been making some alter-
ations in that particular court room, and it was all fin-
ished but the dock for the prisoner. They are going
to put in some sort of a wire cage for the prisoners to
sit in, but the contractors had not delivered it yet, when
this case was called."

"I see. I see. What is the countryman's name?"

"Silas Landgrove."

"I suppose the inspector telephoned for me as soon
as this thing happened; eh?"

"Sure he did. I went down at once. I told him
I didn't know when you would be home, but that I
thought you were about due. He wants to see you as
soon as possible."

"All right. Now what about the woman who did
the shrieking at the door."

"Epilepsy."

"Real, or feigned?"

"If it wasn't real, it was mighty well feigned; so
well that she fooled the doctors who happened to be
present. She foamed at the mouth all right, and rolled
her eyes, and all that. At all events, it passed for
epilepsy at the time, and she was sent away in a hack."

"Where to?"

"Nobody seems to have remembered to take her ad-
dress."

"Odd, isn't it?"

"Looks to me like a hippodrome."

"As though the doctors were there for the purpose
of taking care of her when she fell in the fit?"

"Just that."

"Was'any person who assisted in the row around the
door arrested?"

"Not one. The officers could not put their hands on
a soul who had assisted in the row—that is, nobody

save the woman, and she was as stiff as a corpse, according to the reports."

"And the doctors carried her to a hack, eh?"

"They carried her out to the corridor, first. There they revived her. Then they took her to a hack. They must have taken one, also, for none of them have been seen since."

"They were doctors, I suppose, who happened to be in the audience?"

"Yes; and who proffered their services. Doctors always do that, you know."

"They happened to be conveniently near the door, didn't they?"

"So they did," replied Chick, grinning.

"I think the newspapers have done well to christen Carruthers the master criminal, lad."

"Sure thing! They ought to christen Inez, next."

"What name would you give to her, Chick?"

"I'd call her the master criminal's mascot."

"You have seen her, haven't you, Chick?"

"You bet I have."

"And you say she is very beautiful?"

"Without exaggeration, Nick, I think she is the most exquisitely beautiful creature I ever saw in my life. She——"

"Easy, lad, easy. Do you think she belongs to the criminal class?"

"If her appearance is any criterion, I should say that she was an angel."

"Bosh! That doesn't answer my question."

"Well, I think she is a young woman of culture and refinement, who is in love with the most daring and reckless criminal I ever knew. Is that an answer?"

"Pretty near. You mean by that——"

"I mean by that that I think a woman in love, as I believe that woman can love, would not stop to consider whether a thing was right or wrong, if it were demanded of her by the man she loved."

"Good, lad. I reckon you've about struck the on the head there. What do you know about her?"

"Nothing, yet, save that she lives in Seventy- Street—you know the house, for you arrested Carrr ers on her doorstep."

"Yes."

"Patsy will report here some time to-night. Ti Ichi returned last week, while you were away, an have directed him to relieve Patsy at ten o'clock night."

"Good! Where is he now?"

"Gone to the tombs. I told him to be present w habeas corpus proceedings when Silas Landgrove brought into court."

"I want you to be there, Chick; and when L grove is released, as he will be, I want you t home with him and to stick to him. We've got t Carruthers back again."

"Sure thing."

"Something is likely to leak, through Landgr

"I think so."

"If he is a regular confederate of Carruthers', thing will develop if we watch him long enough on the other hand, he is simply a makeshift, wh hired for the purpose, it won't be long before h begin to brag about it among his friends. That i end of the job, Chick."

"All right."

"You will have to be careful, for I take it from you have told me, that a steel trap isn't any s than he is."

"Right you are. That's my opinion, too."

"You had better skip along downtown and Ten-Ichi. Send him directly to me."

"All right, sir."

"Suit your own ideas as to how you work the with the farmer, only work it. I'll take the In of it. If you want any help of any kind, or sh

re Patsy or Ten-Ichi at that end, telephone in, or ite, as you please. Now, have you given me every int of the case that is in your knowledge?"

"I think so. Every one."

"All right. We may as well go into the house now. hink this is the first time we have ever held a con- tation on the front steps, isn't it?"

"I guess it is."

"Report as often as you have anything to tell— d stick to Silas Landgrove."

"You bet!"

CHAPTER III.

THE SUBTLETY OF A WOMAN.

As soon as Chick had taken his departure as the de- ive directed him to do, Nick made himself up with siderable care and proceeded at once to the head- rters of the police in Mulberry Street.

is costume was that of an ordinary man of the ld; that is to say, he was dressed in the height of on, although not excessively so, his greatest care ranging the make-up having been to avoid recogni- even by his intimates.

was generally known that he had been absent from city for some time, and it was not known when he expected to return.

e realized now that Carruthers and his confederates taken advantage of this fact to work the time- scheme they had used for his escape.

ad Nick Carter been in town they would not have d to attempt it, for he would undoubtedly have " in the court room, and he would instantly have sed the reason for the shrieks and the undue ex- ent around the door at the moment of convening ourt.

e preferred, therefore, that they should still remain norance of his proximity, if such a thing were pos- and he knew that Carruthers would have plenty of spies on hand to inform him of the detective's re- turn, if the fact should become known.

Accordingly, when he entered at the main door of police headquarters, he paused there in a hesitating manner, at last stepping forward to an officer.

"Can you tell me where I can find Inspector Mc- Clusky?" he asked, courteously.

"Last door on the left of the corridor," replied the officer, without raising his eyes, or appearing to take any interest in the question or in his own reply. It was a sample of the courtesy (?) with which a stranger is received there, and is, in this respect, in striking contrast with the real politeness of officials at Scotland Yard, in London, as also at the headquarters of the Paris police.

"Thank you," said Nick. "You are very kind." Then he walked back through the corridor and passed through the indicated door.

"I would like to see Inspector McClusky," he said, to the man in charge.

"What's your business with him?" was the gruff response.

"Unfortunately," replied Nick, "it doesn't happen to be any business of yours, so I cannot tell you."

The sergeant eyed the apparent stranger savagely for a moment, and then he snapped out:

"He's busy now. Take a seat and wait for him if you want to."

"Will you take my card to him?"

"I tell you he's busy."

Nick quietly drew a card from a case he carried, and, having made a slight pencil mark upon it, walked to the desk and laid it before the grouchy sergeant.

"I think," he said, slowly, "that you will spare your- self some unnecessary heartburns and some useless regrets if you see that this card is given to the in- spector at once."

He dropped the card on the desk and returned to a chair behind him.

The sergeant glanced furtively at the card, and then at the detective.

Presently, after waiting a full minute, he called to one of the officers in the corridor.

"Take this in to the chief," he ordered. "Tell him the man is waiting."

The card was taken inside, and the officer who acted as messenger reappeared almost instantly.

"The inspector will see you at once," he said, leaving the door open for Nick to pass inside, which he did immediately.

Then the door closed, and Nick and the inspector were alone together.

"I suppose Chick has told you all about it," was the inspector's greeting, after they had shaken hands.

"He has told me all he knew," returned the detective.

"And that is as much as anybody knows."

"You weren't in the court room when it happened, were you, George?"

"I should say not. I wish to Heaven I had been."

"How did it happen that there wasn't a man from this office there at the time?"

"I had a man there all the morning; in fact, I have had one there every day—but he went out to his luncheon when the others went, and he hadn't returned. He has been fined a month's pay, and suspended for another month. However, that doesn't remedy the matter."

"No; it didn't prevent Carruthers' escape, and it doesn't recapture him."

"Did you ever know of such a lot of chumps as those court officers?"

"Oh, yes, often; other court officers. I think they are usually selected because they are too stupid for other service. Isn't it your lazy, sleepy fellow who always puts in an application for that job?"

"Always; and he gets it because he isn't wanted anywhere else."

"Well, let's get down to the question. Carruth is at large again. What are you going to do about it?"

"I'm going to ask Nick Carter to find him for and to bring him back here," replied the inspector, a smile.

"I have already done that very thing, twice."*

"True; but you know about the old saying that third time proves?"

"Yes. Suppose I do find him and bring him again; will you engage to keep him, next time?"

The inspector did not regard it as necessary to ply, and both detectives laughed heartily.

"Do you know anything about the woman?" as Nick, suddenly.

"What woman? Which woman?" asked the spector.

"The one who sat beside him during the selectic the jury, who was so surprised because of his e that she fainted away."

"I know her name."

"What is it?"

"Inez Navarro."

"And she lives in Seventy-fifth Street, between son Avenue and Fifth. Is that the one?"

"Yes; that's the one."

"What else do you know about her?"

"I know that she is the most wonderfully bea woman I ever saw."

"Oh, bosh! Oh, fudge! Everybody throws th me until I am almost on the point of believing it."

"It is true. You will say it yourself when yo her."

"Perhaps. What is she besides being beauti

"She is a young woman of about twenty. She

*See NICK CARTER WEEKLY, Nos. 407, 408 and 409.

me with her father and a stepmother. Her father
invalid—that is, he is confined to the house, but is
bedridden. The mother is a society woman who
ds most of her time away from home. At the
nt moment, she is said to be in Europe."

And the girl—Inez?"

s above and beyond reproach in every way, so far
can learn. Her friendliness with Carruthers, and
remaining with him during the trial, is the only
hensible thing she has ever done, according to my
rmation."

She goes in good society?"

The best."

Nick says you have a shadow on her."

Of course."

What has he reported, of interest?"

Nothing."

Hasn't she been out since the escape?"

She has not left the house once."

Do you think she was mixed up in the conspiracy
ape?"

did at first; but now, frankly, I do not."

What do you think?"

imply that she is a trusting young girl who has
in love with the handsome face and engaging
rs of Carruthers, and that, like all romantic girls,
lieved in him against all the world. That is all."

Well, that may be all," responded Nick, "but I don't
it is."

Why not?"

She was a little too handy with her gun, to be so
fully innocent."

Handy with her gun? What do you mean by

Didn't I ever tell you about it?"

think not."

It was on her doorstep where I arrested Carruth-
the last time I took him, if you will remember."

"Yes."

"He had just run up the steps to speak to her, and I had to run up the steps to him. In order to get him without trouble, I had to smash him under the jaw, and when I hit him and knocked him into the arms of three of your men at the foot of the steps, this girl, Inez, let drive a bullet at me from the doorway. Then she slammed the door shut and went inside. I paid no attention to it at the time, and I doubt if I would ever have given it another moment of thought, if she were not mixed up in this escape."

"She must have had her pistol rather handy; eh, Nick?"

"Yes; and know how to use it rather quickly, too."

"You think, then, that she was a confederate in the plan of escape?"

"I think more than that: I think she engineered it."

"Ah! you do, eh?"

"Yes. It was planned and carried out with the subtlety of a woman. Look at the facts for a moment. The man who took Carruthers' place was—and has proved that he is—a simple farmer who had never been in the city before that day. Then she fainted away at the sight of him; that was going a little too far, I think. Then, three doctors were ready at hand near the door when the other woman threw the fit. They carted her into the corridor and worked over her there until the attention of others was distracted, when they took her to a hack, and disappeared with her. The men who pushed, and crowded, and made all the row around the woman with the fit, escaped before a hand could be laid upon any of them. In short, there was not a move which was not foreseen, and, to cap it all, when the thing was over, there was not an arrest made that would hold water. Oh, yes, inspector; Inez Navarro is very much in it, as you will find. Anyhow, I'm going to the house to see her."

CHAPTER IV.

IN THE PRESENCE OF THE SIREN.

It was noon when the detective reached his home after his interview with the inspector, and he found Ten-Ichi, one of his assistants, awaiting him.

"I don't suppose you waited long enough to learn what was done with Silas Landgrove?" the detective inquired.

"No; but Chick has telephoned in that he was set at liberty."

"Very good. Now, Ten-Ichi, I want you to go to Seventy-fifth Street and relieve Patsy. Send him here to me at once. You are simply to watch the house and to keep tabs on every person who enters or leaves it. I want their descriptions, and everything about them."

"Yes, sir."

"If the young woman goes out at all, you are to keep with her, no matter where she goes."

"I understand."

"You will probably have no difficulty in finding Patsy."

"Oh, no; I think not."

"Send him here as soon as possible. As soon as I can see him, I wish to go out myself."

Nick was at his luncheon when the telephone bell rang, an hour later. Ten-Ichi was at the other end of the wire.

"Well?" said Nick.

"I have taken the chance of leaving the house unguarded for a moment in order to tell you that I can't find Patsy anywhere. He is not here. I am certain of that. I have made every signal, and——"

"Probably Inez has gone out and he has followed her."

"If I did not know to the contrary, I would not have left the house unguarded while I came here. She is there. I saw her at the window not ten minutes ago."

"Humph!" said Nick. "That will do. Go back your watch."

The detective returned to his luncheon.

"She has spotted Patsy all right," he mused. "and some manner she has managed to lead him off on a wild-goose chase. All right, I won't wait for h

He finished his luncheon, and then, after making entire change in his appearance, he started for the h of Inez Navarro.

The costume he had adopted was a favorite with especially when he had occasion to interview yo ladies who might be inclined to hold him at a tance—to freeze him with reserve, or to snub in other words, it was his Joshua Juniper costume. slight alterations.

In it he appeared to be a man approaching s years of age, and he looked like a countryman f head to feet, save for the shrewd character he gav his features, and the evidence of sophistication w he permitted to appear.

The advantage he possessed in this costume that he could say things which in any other rig w have sounded impertinent, but which, in this ga merely passed for eccentricity.

And so, having observed that Ten-Ichi was prop on the watch, he rang the bell of the house where Navarro lived.

The summons was answered by a dark-skinned low, in whom Nick instantly recognized a Cuban breed—half Spanish, half negro.

The detective looked him over rather quizzically a moment, and then inquired:

"Young man, do yew know how to talk English?"

"Yes, sir."

"Good. Then will yew have the kindness to Miss Inez Navarro that I want to see her?"

"Who shall I say, sir?"

"Why, say it's me."

it she will ask for your name."

ill she? Gosh! What do you suppose she'll do

r, hey? She won't know any more about me

she hears it than she did before. All right, tell

am Joshua Juniper, if she insists on knowing."

d what shall I say you wish to see her about,

y? Oh! Say, young feller, if she asks you that,

ll her that you don't know."

that case she may refuse to see you at all."

that so? All right. Tell her not to hurry. I'll

ve for her to appear if it takes all summer. Tell

n't got no papers to serve, no bills to collect, and

s to grind; and——"

ho is it, Manuel?" inquired a voice from the head

g stairs, which Nick instantly decided belonged

f lady he sought; and, before Manuel could re-

he called in return:

a we jest me, miss; no better and no vauss. This

—Maxwell, as yew call him—wants my hull

me ee before he'll consent to——"

What is it you want?" she interrupted, running

down the stairs.

ant to talk to yew a few minutes, if so's you'll be

, miss. I was sent here by the chief of the de-

ive bureau, and——"

y good, sir. I will see you. Step into the

, if you please."

ank yew, miss. Gosh! but this is a purty room.

mistake," he added, surveying the apartment

which she led him, with evident amazement, and

some time taking in every detail of the place.

he permitted his eyes to rest upon her.

stood facing him, where the light through the

window played upon her exquisite face and

and the thought came to the detective then, that,

in varied experiences, he had never encountered such a perfect specimen of physical beauty as he now beheld.

Descriptions are tiresome things, especially when they are couched in the trite and hackneyed phrase of conventionality; but no trite or hackneyed phrase could comprehend Inez Navarro's marvelous perfections of face and form. She was at once a Juno and a Circe; a Psyche and a Medea. Her eyes were deep and dark, full and luminous. Her hair was as black as night, and yet the sunlight through the window lent to it some stolen hue which was indescribably fascinating. Her features, and her figure——! But why expatiate?

Nick Carter almost forgot the character he had assumed, when he looked upon her; but perceiving that she was cognizant of his admiration, and was smiling because of it, he remarked:

"Miss Navarro, I hope yew won't take no offense if I say something that is on my mind."

"I hope not, certainly," she replied.

"Well, ma'am, it's jest this. I was told by several persons that you were the most beautiful woman they had ever seen, and I didn't believe 'em; that's all."

"I believe you said that you were a detective, sir," she replied, without taking any notice whatever of his remark.

"No; I don't think I said so, miss. What I said was that I was sent here by the chief of the detective bureau. Yew see, miss, he has got it into his head that you didn't have anything to do with that there escape the other day, and I got it into mine that yew did; so he said to me, sez he, 'Josh, yew go up there yourself, and see her;' and so, here I be."

"So I see."

"I thought mebby yew would like to tell me the story about it, miss."

"What story?"

"Well, how you happened to be there at all. Yew see it ain't a usual thing for a beautiful young woman,

like yew be, to go gallivanting around court rooms, and sittin' next to criminals and murderers——"

"I did not believe, when I went to the court room, that Mr. Carruthers was really a murderer," she interposed.

"Which remark," said the detective, "would suggest that you hev changed yewer mind since then."

"I don't know what I believe now, sir," she murmured, dropping into a chair and resting her chin upon her hand. "I don't think I realized that there was really such a thing as crime and criminals in the world, until this terrible experience. I offered to go to the court room with Mr. Carruthers because he requested it, and because I believed in him."

"And because he believed that your presence would have some sort of influence with the jury, eh?"

"Yes; I think he did express that opinion."

"You had been there every day for a whole week, hadn't you?"

"Yes; every day."

"And didn't yew know anything at all about any plans he had made to escape?"

"I knew that he had an idea of escaping," she replied demurely, "but I had no idea when or how it was to be consummated."

"U-m!" said the detective. "Say, Miss Navarro, do women, as a rule, go to court with chaps like Carruthers, and subject themselves tew remark and all sort of unpleasant things, unless they're in love with the man? Hey?"

"I don't in the least know what women do, Mr. Juniper," she replied, calmly. "I have never paid much attention to what other women do. I make my own rules."

"I see, miss, that I will have to make my question a little more pointed. The question I meant to imply, was this: Were yew or are yew——"

"Oh, I know perfectly well what you meant to imply. You wish to know if I am in love with Mr. Carruthers," and she smiled brightly at the detective. Then she added: "Now, which answer would please you best? Yes, or no?"

"She's a match for any cross-examiner in the country," thought Nick. Aloud he said: "Being as I'm somewhat of a romantic disposition, miss, although I confess I don't look it, I'd rather think that yew were heart-whole."

Inez laughed outright at this.

"In that case," she said, "you may remain perfectly content. I am not in love with Mr. Carruthers or with anybody else. I think, however, if you will excuse your mind of the egotism suggested by my remark, that I may as well confess that Mr. Carruthers professes to be very much in love with me."

"Well," drawled Nick, with a twinkle in his eye, "yew can't blame him for that, can yew?"

"I am only sorry for him."

"Sure thing! Say, Miss Navarro, hev you heard from him since he escaped, the other day?"

She smiled brightly at him again; and then, calmly she replied:

"I might ask you again which answer you would prefer to that question; but I won't. I'll tell you the truth and admit that I have heard from him twice, since then. Would you like to see the messages he has sent to me?"

Nick stared at her an instant in astonishment. Then he smiled back at her and replied:

"Yew can jest bet yewer sweet life I would, miss."

CHAPTER V.

A WOMAN OF MANY MYSTERIES.

Inez Navarro calmly rose from her chair and left the room; but she was gone only a moment or two, when she returned with two letters in her hand.

These she gave to him at once.

"The one on top is the first I received," she said to him, and he opened that one.

It contained merely a penciled note of a few lines written on the back of an old envelope. It said:

"DEAR INEZ: This will assure you that, so far, I have successfully eluded the officers, and am now well on my way to liberty. This is an apology for not having acquainted you with my plans, but I could not, in justice, subject you to the danger of being my accomplice.

The second note was as follows:

DEAR INEZ: Twenty-four hours have now elapsed ce my escape ,and I may add that I am beyond all nger of rearrest. I shall not be taken again. ither will I ask you to stand my friend any longer, ce I am totally unworthy of your friendship. You not believe in my innocence, since I am not inno- nt. After a year or two, when the hue and cry after has blown over, I may make myself known to you in, but, in the meantime, I shall remain—as I would ssently have become had I not escaped—dead to you. No doubt you will be hounded by detectives who ll suspect that you had some part in my escape, and one in particular, a Nick Carter, who is really rather good fellow, and I think pretty much on the square. u may show this letter, if you care to do so, as a si-proof of your non-complicity in the affair, al- ugh you may as well know that very little credence ll be given to my word.

This is all I will venture to say now. You know that I would like to write, and I know how little all would affect you. If I were worthy of your , I should fight for it to the last gasp, but, all un- thy as I am, I put it from me now and forever.

"M."

Nick returned the letters to their respective en- pes and looked at the postmarks.

They told him nothing save that the letters had been led at the general post office, one of them—the —soon after Carruthers' escape, and the other, late he afternoon of the following day.

e returned them to the young woman.

Well, miss," he said, drily, "they seem to exoner- yew, don't they?"

Possibly; only I did not show them to you for that ose."

No? Why, then?"

Merely because I saw that you felt assured that I heard from Mr. Carruthers, and so, if you received negative reply when you asked the question, you ld not believe me."

he detective rose to take his leave.

e confessed to himself that he was greatly puzzled e demeanor of the young woman, for, notwith- ding her beauty and her apparent innocence of all , he could not disabuse his mind of the idea that was deceiving him, and that she was perfectly well aware of the locality where Carruthers was concealed at that moment.

"Are you going?" she inquired, politely, also rising.

"Yes; I think so," he returned.

"But you haven't done any detective work, have you?" she asked, quizzically.

Nick halted, and turned, facing her. That question was the first and only misstep she had made, and he instantly determined that it was not prompted, as she intended it to appear to be, by guilelessness.

"No, ma'am," he replied, "I ain't, if anybody should happen to ask you; but maybe a leetle later, I may do some. Jest now, I'm so kerflummixed by them eyes of yourn that I can't seem to think of anything else. By the way, miss, you ain't happened to see a young feller what looked as if he might be a groceryman's boy, a-hangin' around here, have yew?"

"Oh, yes, I have," she replied, brightly, and without the least trace of annoyance in her face or voice. "If you mean a boy that was watching this house, certainly I have seen him. I supposed he was watching for me to go out, and so I went out, just to please him. Somehow, I lost him somewhere on the street—I don't know just where; but I suppose he knows how to find his way home, doesn't he?"

"I hope so," drawled Nick. "Maybe, though, when he finds out how easy it was for yew tew lose him, he won't think he knows quite so much as he thought he did."

"Perhaps not. I think the last I saw of him was somewhere in Macy's store, although I won't be certain about that."

"Thank you, miss. I s'pose if I should want to call ag'in, yew will be tew home, eh?"

"Why, yes. Call at any time you please. I have found you quite entertaining."

"Hev yew, now? Well, well! Who'd have thunk it? Good-day, miss."

In another moment he was on the street again, and he walked rapidly to Madison Avenue, where he took a car bound downtown, nor did he leave it until he was in the vicinity of the central office.

"Inspector," he said, as soon as he was admitted to

the office of the chief, "I want to know if you agree with me in thinking that Carruthers is about the smartest crook we ever knew."

"I certainly do. Why?"

"Because I have found a woman who is as much smarter than he is, as he is smarter that a Doyers Street dope fiend."

"Do you mean Inez?"

"Yes, Inez."

"Smart, eh?"

"Greased lightning isn't in it. All the same, I would be willing to bet considerable, and give odds at that, that I know where Carruthers is at this moment."

"The deuce you do! Where?"

"In her house."

"Eh? In her house? In the house where she lives?"

"Just that. No more; no less."

"Why do you think that?"

"I haven't got a reason on earth for thinking it—that is, a reason which would appeal to anybody but myself—but I think it, just the same."

"We can't search that house without some tangible excuse for the act."

"I know that. What do you know about that invalid father of hers? Anything?"

"Not a thing."

"Nothing about him in your books?"

"Nothing."

"Humph!"

"What are you driving at, Nick?"

"This: Inez Navarro is altogether too fly and too smart for a woman of her position in society. Things are not what they seem at that address, or else I am talking in my dotage. The invalid father, and the equipment who continually travels in Europe, might make very good cloaks to cover a skeleton or two, and that address in Seventy-fifth Street is sufficiently high-toned to make the safest kind of a retreat for persons who did not wish their habits and customs inquired into."

"Well, what of it?"

"Another thing," continued the detective; "Carruthers has never been able to fool her regarding his real character. She is too smart for that; and if she has known what he was, all along, and has stood by him, fought for him, received letters from him, and written letters to him, sat beside him in court when he was charged with murder, and fainted away for him when she discovered that he had escaped, it follows that she is as deep in the mud as he is in the mire, doesn't it?"

"Perhaps so."

"There's a nigger in the fence somewhere, and Inez Navarro comes pretty near knowing where it is, I suspector. One thing is certain: I am satisfied in my own mind that Carruthers is in that house at this moment, and if I'm alive, I'll tell you whether he is or not, before breakfast time to-morrow morning. So long."

Nick started to his feet and abruptly left the headquarters.

When he arrived at his home, Patsy was there awaiting him.

"Well, Patsy," said the detective; "what's doing?"

"Nothin' doing. I'm just a common, double-barreled action, dyed-in-the-wool, gilt-edged chump, that's what I am!"

"What's the matter now?"

"I let a woman fool me."

"Fool you? How?"

"Why, she led me a dance all over town, into stores and out of them again; into hotels and out of them again; through milliner shops; in coupés; street cars and so forth; and then she left me kicking my heels in the waiting room of the Grand Central Station, waiting for her to come out of the ladies' retiring room where she had gone. Say, there ain't only one exit to that place, and I know it, because I took the trouble to investigate afterward."

"After what? What are you talking about?"

"Why, this: After I had waited there more than two hours, positive that she hadn't come out, I felt a touch on my shoulder, and when I turned to see who did it, blessed if she wasn't standing there beside me, laughing at me.

"Aren't you tired with waiting?' she asked me.

"'Bet your sweet life I am,' I said, taking the bull by the horns, so to speak, for I saw in an instant that was onto me. 'Why didn't you come out sooner?'

"'Why,' said she, as pleasant as a basket of chips, grinning at me all the while, "I came out at once. have been 'way downtown again, and home, also.'

"'You don't say so!' says I.

"'Indeed I have,' says she; 'and while I was at home, r master, Mr. Carter, called and asked about you. did, really. He seemed to be worried, too.'

"She stopped then, and laughed aloud; and then she ded:

"'Don't you think, little boy, that you had better along home now? Or don't you know the way?'

"Say, she's pretty, all right, but I could have given one in the jaw with mighty good relish at that icular moment;" and Patsy thrust his hands deeply o his pockets and scowled at the furniture.

But Nick Carter neither scowled nor smiled, for he . in the incident, several facts which confirmed his ady half-formed suspicions.

CHAPTER VI.

A MIDNIGHT EXPEDITION.

Two things in Patsy's narrative impressed Nick Carter as important.

One was that Inez Navarro should have been able outwit the lad as she had done.

The other was, that she should have known that he was Nick Carter, when he called upon her at her house the afternoon.

"I don't think, Patsy, that you need feel as crestfallen as you appear to be," he said, when the story was concluded. "There is evidently more to it than one of us is aware of at the present moment. Now call your mind back to the moment when she touched you on the shoulder, in the waiting room of the station."

"Well?"

"Did you notice if Ten-Ichi was there?"

"No; I didn't notice anything at all, except that I was a chump."

"Would you like to take her trail again, Patsy?"

"Wouldn't I, though! But I don't suppose you'll let me."

"To be sure I'll let you. It is what I wish you to do. I have put Ten-Ichi on the same lay, and I think, between you, you ought to be able to shadow her successfully, if she happens to go out again; although I will confess to you that I suspect that she went out to-day for the express purpose of leading you a chase."

"I think so, too."

When Patsy had gone, the detective sat for a long time where he was, thinking.

"The fact that she knew me to be Nick Carter, although I was thoroughly disguised, proves to my satisfaction that Carruthers is in the house, and was doubtless where he heard every word that passed between us," he mused.

"But how did she manage to avoid Patsy? That is the mystery.

"Patsy answers that question by believing that he was simply stupid, and that in some way she managed to leave that room and the house as well, without his seeing her; but I think I know better than that.

"There isn't a better shadow or a more careful one in the whole country than Patsy, and if he had not told me the story he has, I would not believe that she could go into that room and alter her appearance so that she could pass out of it again, before his eyes, without his recognizing her.

"If it were anybody but Patsy, I would think that in the first place she rigged up a dummy—that is, dressed some other woman to represent her, and sent her out to entice Patsy away; but Pat could not be fooled—ah! Carruthers is an adept at that sort of thing, as I well know. Perhaps he had a hand in fixing up the dummy, if dummy there was. No. I don't believe it was a dummy.

"Anyhow, I am resolved to see and to inspect the inside of that house in Seventy-fifth Street before morning, if I can do it, and I think I can."

He did not go out again till late.

At ten o'clock that evening he received a telephonic message from Chick.

"Everything is quiet here," said Chick. "Silas went straight to his home, after he left the court room—exactly as if he had got enough of New York and was glad to shake the dust of the city off his feet."

"Where is his home, Chick? Where are you now?" asked the detective.

"I'm at Southold. He lives about a mile out of this place. It is a beautiful farm, on the north coast, and the house is one of the old homesteads which have stood here since colonial times."

"All right. Get back there as quick as you can. I may look you up down there, in a day or two."

He took up again the book he had been reading, but only to be again disturbed, for it was not fifteen minutes later when Ten-Ichi came in.

"Patsy is there on duty," said Ten-Ichi, "and I thought I would run in and report."

"Quite right; that is, if you have anything to report."

"Well, sir, I don't think there is much, only what you already know."

"About your trip to the Grand Central Station?"

"Yes."

"Tell me your version of the matter."

"Miss Navarro came out soon after you went away—that is, within an hour."

"Do you think she spotted you?"

"No; I am quite sure she did not. I took good care to keep out of sight from the windows of the house all the time."

"Good! Go ahead."

"She went, as you know, to the Grand Central Station; and there, she walked directly up to Patsy and touched him on the shoulder. They talked for a few minutes—I suppose he has told you what was said?"

"Yes."

"Then he went away—to come here, I suppose—and she, after laughing at him, went inside the room he had been watching all the time. She was in there about ten minutes when she came out again and went home. She has not been outside since then."

"Ten-Ichi," said Nick, speaking slowly, "are you positive that the woman you followed home from the station was the same woman whom you followed when you went there?"

"Why, yes," replied Ten-Ichi. "It had not occurred to me that it could be otherwise. No, I am sure it was the same."

"Probably it was. I asked the question because I wish you, next time you shadow her, to be absolutely sure there are no changes wrought, almost before your eyes. That is all. You may go to bed now. What time are you to relieve Patsy?"

"At daylight."

"All right."

Nick resumed his reading.

At midnight he put the book aside and turned on the lights before his mirror. Then he busied himself for half an hour in altering his appearance, so that when he was through and prepared to leave the house he had every appearance of an ordinary street tough.

And yet, it was only the dress he had assumed which gave him that appearance, for he had preferred, for reasons of his own, to preserve his own identity under the rough exterior disguise he had assumed.

The reason why he decided thus will soon be obvious.

Thus arrayed, he sallied forth from the house soon after one o'clock in the morning, and took his way to Seventy-fifth Street, where he arrived in the vicinity of the home of Inez Navarro at the moment when the city clocks were pointing toward the hour of two.

His first object was to find Patsy, but, although he spent more than a quarter of an hour in searching for him, the lad was nowhere to be found.

"I wonder if it is possible that Inez has gone somewhere, and that Patsy is on her track," mused the detective. "That must be the case, and, if it is, it behooves me to use considerable caution in what I am about to undertake. Still, if Carruthers is inside the house, as I suspect he is, I have got a delicate as well as a dangerous job before me."

He approached the house with exceeding caution.

Fortunately, the street was not particularly well lighted, and, moreover, the house upon which his at-

fixed was situated, as nearly as possible, midween two of the lights, so that it occupied the w portion of the block.

ight almost seem as if there was a design in cting the location of that house," was Nick's as he drew stealthily near it.

glided along from doorstep to doorstep, makone at a time, and at each resting place seatnself on the lower step of the house, where he until he was sure that he was unobserved, and Were was no person in sight to see his next move. it was almost three o'clock when he finally arthe steps he sought, and glided up them until d in the shadow of the embrasure of the door-

re is hoping that they haven't put up a chain," ttered to himself, "although if they have done so, have to cut it. All the same, if it is posor me to enter and leave the house without dish I should much prefer to leave no traces of my ce behind me."

picklock did the business for the latch, but he ed that the key in the big lock underneath it been turned.

turn that key, he had recourse to his key-nipade for the purpose, with which he seized upon of the key and turned it with the same ease he have done had the key been on his side of the

rtheless, when that was done, and he had again the nightlatch also, the door opened only a litshowing that what he had dreaded was actuase—that is, that the chain was in place.

door, therefore, opened only a couple of inches; was a matter of seconds only to cut the chain his steel nippers, and thus the vestibule door stood before him.

the inner door offered the same impediment, he was obliged to repeat the operations he had to perform on this door.

At last he stood inside the hall, with both doors closed behind him.

The light, shrouded by a red globe, burned at the far end of the hall, and he glided toward it and extinguished it.

The reader will remember that he had already been inside the house, only a few hours before, and that he had studied the interior with considerable care at that time. He knew, therefore, without the assistance of a light, how to avoid colliding with objects of furniture.

At three o'clock in the morning people are generally supposed to be sleeping.

Two is generally the limit of "sitting up." It is for that reason why burglars almost without exception select the hour between two and three for their expeditions.

After extinguishing the light Nick passed on into the library and listened intently, standing silently in the middle of the floor while he did so.

But he heard no sound of any description; so, presently, he passed through the curtained doorway into the parlor.

Here again he listened, and here, as before, no sound greeted his ears.

Then he passed again into the hallway and halted at the foot of the stairs; but even as he did so, he heard a step outside the front door, and the next instant an electric bell inside the house rang a loud alarm.

Somebody was on the doorstep who claimed admittance to the house, and Nick realized that whoever answered the summons would discover that the door chains had been cut, and would therefore know that the house had been entered.

And then he heard a door open on the floor above him.

CHAPTER VII.

ON THE BRINK OF DISCOVERY.

The detective had noticed, when he was in the house earlier in the day, that near the door in the front hall, there was a recess in the party wall in which a stationary hat-and-coat rack had been built, and also that a huge brown topcoat hung in one corner of it.

He recalled that fact now, and he believed the cape-

coat was large enough to cover him, if he could succeed in getting behind it.

So, while the footsteps over his head hurried toward the top of the stairs for the purpose of descending and admitting the person outside, and while that person, with every evidence of impatience, continued to press the button of the electric bell, he glided forward toward the niche.

He discovered, too late, that the cape-coat was no longer there. It had been removed since he was in the house in the afternoon.

But there was a smaller coat there, and this he seized and pulled toward him so that it concealed his face and hands, and he hoped that he might escape discovery, at least until the person who was entering, and the other who was coming to open the door, had withdrawn sufficiently far from the doorway to permit him to make a dash for liberty.

He despaired now of an opportunity to search the house as he had hoped to do; he only desired, under the circumstances, an opportunity to escape without discovery.

When he pulled the folds of the lesser coat over his face, the person who had been summoned by the bell was already halfway down the stairs, so there was nothing for him to do save to wait where he was and to take his chances of discovery, and subsequent escape.

That he would be discovered he had not a doubt.

The mere opening of the front door would be sufficient to apprise the occupant of the house that somebody was there who did not belong there.

The chains on both doors were cut and hanging, and, moreover, the light under the red globe at the end of the hall had been extinguished.

All these thoughts flashed through his mind, the doors were opened and the person outside was admitted.

The detective listened for an exclamation of alarm over the severed chains; but none came. He listened for some expression of surprise because of the extinguished light at the end of the hall; but none came.

He listened also for some word of greeting between the person who had rang the bell and the one who opened the door; but none came.

Not a word was spoken.

Not a sound was made, save those necessary incident upon passing through the hall, opening the door and the depositing of some heavy substance upon the floor inside the hall by the latter.

He could not see from his place of concealment because the small coat covered his face and eyes, and he regretted now that in his haste he had not considered that fact, and arranged the folds of the coat so he might have done so.

Had he been able to see, he would have seen a series of pantomimic gestures which were exchanged between the two men who stood there, revealing to each other only by the glare of a match which one of them had lighted.

He would have seen that man point toward the detective's feet, where they showed in the niche behind the small coat behind which he had sought to conceal himself.

He would have seen the newcomer nod his head in understanding, and then deliberately remove his own cape-coat from his shoulders—the same which had supposed hung in the niche in the wall—and step forward and deliberately hang it on the hook over the detective's head, so that the fold of it completely covered him.

But he saw none of this.

All that he realized was, that for some inexplicable reason neither of the persons in the hallway—and he had no means of telling whether they were men or women, or a man and a woman—had noticed the condition of the chains or the red light in the hall.

Next, that a complete covering had been hung over him, so that he was entirely concealed from view, and that the person who had placed it there had done so without discovering his presence.

And all this time he remained [illegible] breathing in his anxiety to remain perfectly [illegible]

Next, the heavy substance, whatever it was, that had been for a moment deposited on the floor was taken up again and the footsteps of the [illegible]

...ll up the stairs, passed along the upper hall...
...he heard a door closed, as if they had passed
...om and shut themselves inside.
...e detective did not remain in his concealment,
...length of time.
...s not alarmed by the conduct of the two per...
...had stood so close to him while he was con...
...the niche in the wall.
...ow that they must have seen him, for he had
...ce of that glimmer of light produced by the
...match.
...seems be believed, even if they had not seen
...y were aware that somebody was in the house.
...he had no time to lose if he still thought to
...ish his purpose in coming there.
...herefore, no sooner heard their feet upon the
...an he pushed aside the cloak which covered
...l peered out, but the hallway was in dark...
...ve for the faintest glimmer of light which
...ough from some aperture on the second floor.
...but he could see that those persons were men—
...ust, that they were dressed in the garb of men.
...y reached the landing of the second floor,
...ped outside of the niche, and when they passed
...he door and closed it behind them, he stepped
...to the front door, opened them, one after an...
...and left them so, and then, instead of going out
...e street and making good his escape, he darted
...ain into the house and almost flew up the stairs
...econd floor.
...s a daring thing to do, since it was more than
...if Nick's surmises were correct concerning
...ersons, that the two men would not be an instant
...ho knew for fact, that they would only pretend to
...the door of the room on the second floor, while
...ly they would open it again and remain on the
...for him to make a move of some sort.
...He took all that into consideration when he
...up the stairs after them.
...ick was, if possible, to make them believe that
...escaped from the place, and he believed he
...to do.
...mounted the stairs with light and rapid strides,
...so that he was on the landing within two or three seconds of the time when they closed the door behind them.

But he did not stop there.

He realized that if he completely fooled them, he must pass beyond the door of the room they had entered, and make his way to the floor above that one.

And he was only just in time to accomplish his purpose.

The door through which they had passed was the front one of the second floor—the one which would lead to the front room—and as he glided past it as silently and as swiftly as a spirit, the knob turned, and it was pulled open noiselessly.

Beyond it was utter darkness.

He could see nothing, and he knew therefore that he could not be seen.

Notwithstanding the fact that for one instant he was so close to the person who opened the door that he might have touched him by putting out his hand, he knew that his proximity was unsuspected; and so he stepped upon the lowest stairs of the flight which led to the third floor, and waited, listening.

Whoever that other person was he moved as silently as Nick Carter himself.

The detective could not tell whether he had stopped close to the door and remained there listening, or if he had passed along the hall toward the head of the stairs which led to the parlor floor.

He did not himself dare to move, lest the stairs on which he stood should creak, and thus betray him—and so he waited.

Thus three or four actual minutes elapsed, and any person who has been held in suspense, in utter darkness, for that length of time, will know how interminable the time seemed.

Like everything else, however, the interval came to an end at last.

He sensed, rather than heard, the person in the hall approaching him again, and knew that he, or she, whichever it was, had passed to the head of the parlor stairs and was now returning.

"He has felt the draft from the open door," was

the detective's thought; but he gathered his muscles in preparation for a struggle, if one were coming, as he knew would now be the case if his presence on the stairs had been betrayed by anything.

But evidently it had not been.

The invisible form glided back to the door from which it had issued, and passed into the room.

Still Nick did not move, although he bent his head and listened intently.

He fancied—but he was not certain—that he could hear the sound of faint whispering, and he stepped from the stair, nearer to the door, where he paused and listened again.

He was certain now that they were whispering together, and that they were over at the opposite side of the room, near the windows.

It was at that instant when he resolved upon the boldest move he had yet made.

"The last place on earth where they will look for me," he thought, "is inside the very room where they are now whispering together," and instantly he stepped through the still open door into the room.

The room was in darkness; the inside blinds had been closed and the curtains drawn; still there was a glimmer of light where the windows were located.

Furthermore, Nick had been a longer time in the dark than either of the two persons whom he supposed were in the room, and consequently his eyes had become more accustomed to it.

The great inventor, Thomas Edison, once told the writer that he often worked twelve or fifteen hours at a time in total darkness; inside a room from which every ray of light had been excluded, even to the extent of covering the walls with several thicknesses of dead black cloth; and he asserted—and could there be a better or more reliable authority than the great Edison?—that after eight or ten hours so passed, he could plainly distinguish every object in the room, or even read letters or ordinary print.

When asked how he explained the phenomenon, he explained that it was no phenomenon at all, but merely the fact that the eyes had so dilated that they absorbed the light which radiated from the human ix were thus enabled to see.

Nick Carter had been long enough in the that he could at least see much better than t men in that room.

He could see the outlines of their forms. because they were between him and the window though darkened, still admitted something of

He could see where there were chairs and ticles of furniture located, and therefore how them as he passed across the room.

This he did, noiselessly and instantly.

In the corner he approached there was a hu er-covered couch, which stood out from the w which, fortunately, was sufficiently old-fashion provided with a high back.

He discovered its presence by the touch o gers, as he did the other facts that it had a that it was not against the wall.

Without hesitation, because he realized that conceal himself with all possible speed, he step it, and dropped silently upon the floor behin

And he was not an instant too soon.

Even as his head sank below the level of the couch, one of the other two persons in t stepped forward to the chandelier and turned tric switch, so that the apartment was instantly with a brilliant and indeed almost blinding ligh

And then, to the amazement of the de heard the voice of Inez Navarro say:

"Whoever it was, he has gone, for both of t doors are open."

And then another voice, which he did no nize, responded:

"If the man was Nick Carter, you cannot that he is gone; at least, not until the house is from top to bottom."

"No?" replied Inez; and she laughed that low cal laugh which Nick had heard in the alc

"Perhaps not. Come, then, we will search the if you like, and whether he is Nick Carter, or a nary thief, shoot to kill the moment you see him

CHAPTER VIII.

THE PRISONER ON THE STAIRS.

Carter was amazed when he recognized the Inez as belonging to one of the persons in the because he had supposed that both were men. immediately conjectured that she was the one d been outside—who had rung the bell and de- the heavy substance on the floor of the lower when she was admitted to the house.

lieved, also, that this accounted for the ab- Patsy from his post outside.

could not fool the kid, even if she did make man," he thought; "and now I can figure that is somewhere near again, and that at daylight he relieved by Ten-Ichi."

he meantime he was lying quietly behind the and now that the room was brilliantly lighted, that he could not have selected a better place. couch was so placed that the head of it touched a marble mantel at that side of the room, while ot of it extended toward the rear end of the and toward a passageway which evidently con- that room with the one back of it; but between d the passageway was a tall chiffonier, while be- im, against the wall—in a strange position for hings, truly—hung a pair of heavy velour cur-

e might think those curtains were there to cover ," he mused; "that is, if one supposed that a xisted between this house and the one adjoining. ess they are there merely for ornament."

n he gave his attention again to the persons in om.

could only hear them; he could see nothing of ersons save two pairs of feet as he gazed along rget from underneath the couch.

one of those pairs of feet were as small and as the feet of a fairy might be supposed to ap- the others unquestionably belonged to a man of rable proportions, for they were large and , and they stood squarely and firmly on the floor. e is considerable character in feet, and Nick Carter never realized that fact so thoroughly as at that moment.

With the threatening remark about shooting to kill, Nick saw that the smaller of the two pairs of feet moved rapidly toward the door again.

"Wait," said the man. "You remain here. I will go."

"Nonsense," she replied. "Do you suppose that I am afraid of Nick Carter, or anybody else for that matter?"

"No. I know only too well that you are not. Still——"

"Stay where you are till I return," she interrupted.

She passed into the hallway then, leaving the door open behind her, and Nick instantly perceived that as she passed out, she touched a button somewhere which at once flooded the upper and lower halls with illumination.

"It is mighty lucky for me that she didn't do that when she went into the hallway before," was the detective's thought. "She would have found herself face to face with Nick Carter then, all right."

She was gone two or three minutes, when she returned again.

"Whoever it was," she said, "he has not left the house. He opened the front doors to make us think he had gone; but he is here somewhere yet. And now, Pancho, I have closed both doors and turned the secret lock. He won't get out that way, at least."

"So! Then there seems to be no doubt that the man was Nick Carter?"

"None whatever. Any other man would have actually fled. Or, I might put it another way; no other man would have suspected that we discovered his presence after you hung your cloak over him."

"Ah!" thought Nick. "It was the man who was outside, and not Inez."

"I wish one of us had put a bullet through him while he stood there under the coat," growled the man. "I wanted to do it, and I would have done it if you had not stopped me."

"Stop your growling," said Inez, coldly. "I wish so,

too—now; but it is too late. I did not then think it was Carter. I only thought of the noise your gun would make, and of the inconvenience of having a dead body to dispose of."

"I'd like to have his to dispose of, all right," growled the man; and Inez laughed.

"Perhaps you will have your wish before morning," she said, with a menacing ring in the tones of her voice.

"I wish I thought so. What have you done?" he asked; "turned on the switches?"

"Yes; every one of them."

The man chuckled audibly.

"Then we have nothing to do, I suppose, but sit down here and wait," he said. "We are sure to hear him when he receives the shock."

"Wait," she remarked. "I will close this door and put up the chain. Then I will open it a crack and we will sit here in the dark while we listen. It won't be long before he will suppose the coast is clear, and will commence his investigations. We won't have to wait long after that, for he can't moon around the house very long, in the dark, without coming in contact with the electric current."

She suited action to the words.

In another instant the room was in darkness again, and the detective could hear her arranging the door as she had described.

"By Jove!" thought Nick, in his place of concealment. "They have got the whole house arrranged so they can, by moving a switch or two, turn a current of electricity into the balustrades, and doubtless into many articles of furniture as well; and I would not wonder if they have power enough to give a man quite a shock at that. Luckily, I am posted."

Five, ten, fifteen minutes passed in this silent waiting, and still neither Inez nor her companion uttered a word or made a sound.

But they seemed to be possessed with an unlue amount of patience, doubtless due to the fact that they were so certain of results.

And presently the results came.

Their patience was rewarded to the satisfactic themselves and to the utter amazement of Nick Ca

Probably twenty minutes had elapsed after the in the room was extinguished, when, from the hall and doubtless from about the middle of the fligl parlor stairs, there sounded a half-smothered excl tion, followed by a muttered word or two, half g and half an oath.

Instantly Inez darted to her feet, and with the motion, turned on the light in the chandelier.

That done, she leaped to the door, threw it open pressed the button in the hall which connected the lights above and below, so that almost instantly place was lighter than day.

"Shoot him! Don't wait to do any parleyi Pancho called after her; and then he followed through the door.

Nick, realizing that their attention was entire front of them, and that neither would think to loo hind them, raised his head over the back of the c in order to see what was going on.

Through the open door he could see the man, cho, lean over the balustrade, and as he did so, pistol in his hand and level it at some object him; and he also saw Inez push the weapon aside an angry gesture.

"Fool!" she said. "What is the use of noise? you see that it is not Nick Carter? It is only young assistant—the boy who has tried to sha me."

Then she also leaned over the balustrade, and angry tones changed to a chuckling laugh.

"Poor boy," she said, derisively. "Does it h Will my little laddie tell his mamma all about it w he gets home?"

"Confound you!" groaned Patsy. "Let up, you?"

"Tut, tut, my boy! You are not polite."

Then she turned to her companion.

"Go down and get him, Pancho. Bring him t the room where we can talk to him. I'll turn off switch just as you seize him; but look out, for if a

are correct, he's a little viper; he might sting

ng me! Ho, ho!" replied Pancho; and he went her bidding.

CHAPTER IX.

THE FACE BETWEEN THE CURTAINS.

Carter instantly understood the situation.

y, watching in the street, had discovered that loors of the house were open, and had availed f of the opportunity thus afforded to do a little gating on his own account.

e, he was exceeding orders in so doing, but he ess knew that the act would be excusable if he ded in discovering anything of value.

d so, he had entered the house and fallen into ap laid for his chief.

the discovery of Patsy on the stairs bore an- aspect also.

ccurred to Nick that the occupants would no believe that he was in the house. They would se it had been Patsy all the time.

conjecture, however, he had not reckoned on rewdness of the woman with whom he had to

soon as Pancho, who was a large and powerful brought Patsy up the stairs, carried him into room and, having searched him and taken s from him, placed him in one of the large Inez stepped in front of him, and in a sharp inquired:

here is Nick Carter, your master?"

!" replied Patsy, inconsiderately.

turned to Pancho.

is boy has only just entered the house," she "He is not the one whose legs we saw in the downstairs. Don't you see the difference?"

now that you speak of it," replied Pancho. Carter is still inside this house."

it would seem."

the door."

"All right, Inez, but he won't get caught in your electric trap now. He doubtless heard all that has occurrrd."

"I don't care. Lock the door. He can go out as he came in. We will attend to this chap now, and Nick Carter—I hope he hears me—cannot do me a greater favor than to listen at the door. If he wants to save the life of Patsy, as he calls this boy, he will make terms with us, for I swear that I will torture this lad to death if he refuses. What do you think of that, young man?" she added, turning to Patsy.

"I don't think," replied Patsy, grinning. He had recovered his wits and his courage as well by this time.

"I'll make you think—and talk, too—before I have done with you," said Inez, menacingly.

"Aw, go chase yourself!" responded Patsy, upon whom the woman's beauty seemed to have had no effect.

"What a witty lad you are, to be sure!" said Inez; "but you weren't witty enough to follow me home, were you?"

Patsy's grin fled upon the instant.

"Confound you!" he muttered. "I'd like to know how you did it."

"Did what?"

"Fooled me the way you did. Say, you're a crack-a-jack, you are. I thought I had you dead to rights, and I didn't give it up until I felt sure you wouldn't come out again to-night. Then I thought that inasmuch as I had lost you, I would come back here, and keep my eye on the house, same as I had been doing."

"And then you saw the door open and walked in. Is that it?"

"Sure that's it. Who said it wasn't? But how in thunder did you get here before I did? That's what I want to know."

"The same way I got out of the waiting room of the station," she replied, smiling.

"Oh! you did, eh? I'll tell you one thing, I'll find out what that way is before I'm very much older, ma'am, and don't you forget it!"

During this conversation, Nick was lying on his face behind the couch, keeping watch as best he could

of the feet of those who were in the room in front of him.

His attention was so concentrated upon that effort that he did not notice a slight movement of the curtains behind him.

Nevertheless they did move.

The motion was almost imperceptible at first, as if it were caused by the opening of some aperture behind them, and they were in consequence disturbed by the draft.

There was, however, no sound of any kind accompanying the motion, and so the detective's attention was not drawn to them.

After that first slight motion, they subsided again; but presently there was a more decided movement, and then, at a height about equal to a man's head, they parted, and if Nick had been observing them he would have seen the four fingers of a man's hand grasp them and draw one of them aside.

But the motion was so stealthy, and so noiselessly made, that it did not even attract the attention of Inez and Pancho, who continued their conversation with Patsy.

As the curtains drew further apart, the mustached face of a man slowly appeared in the opening thus made, and as it thrust itself further and further into view, if Nick had been looking, he would have recognized at once the handsome, alert and always sneering visage of the much-hunted Morris Carruthers.

For a full minute he held that position, looking into the room and observing the scene which was being enacted there between Patsy and his captors.

He did not lower his eyes, and therefore he did not observe the man who was stretched upon the floor directly beneath him—accidentally in his path, in fact, that he had but to take the one necessary step to carry him into the room in order to tread upon him.

Once he seemed about to take that step; then he hesitated again.

He seemed, indeed, to derive some curious enjoyment out of the scene, and from the conversation between the three; and all this time he had made no sound, and not one of the four persons in the room suspected his proximity.

And then fate decreed that he should lower his eyes.

They dropped slowly, surveying the entire interior of the room as they traveled from point to point, until at last his gaze fell upon the couch and then shifted to the floor behind it.

If, reader, you had been watching him then, you would have seen the start he gave—but you would have seen it only in his eyes.

Not a muscle of his body moved in the slightest degree, save those definite ones which control the eyes.

But those expressive features seemed to contract until they narrowed themselves to slits, while at the same time the pupils dilated until they gleamed like the eyes of a snake.

Then slowly, an inch at a time, the face began to recede behind the curtain, until presently it disappeared.

Then the fingers of his hand also were lost to view, and then the curtain dropped back into place, exactly as it had appeared before Carruthers had ventured to look into the room.

And still the three persons in the interior of the room, and the detective behind the protection afforded by the couch, preserved their relative positions.

How much longer this condition of things might have continued, it is impossible to say; but it was destined to end suddenly and in a startling manner.

Again the curtains parted. Again the face of Carruthers appeared in the opening, and this time it was followed by his head and shoulders.

This time, also, Inez happened to raise her eyes toward the curtain—a movement on her part which Nick, because of his position, was unable to observe.

She smiled at Carruthers and was about to address some remark to him, when she instantly desisted, for he placed his fingers to his lips in a signal for her to be quiet.

In that one quick glance she discovered, also, that Carruthers held a big revolver in his hand.

He held it by the barrel, so that it was but a bludgeon, and as he looked he leaned forward and he towered over the form of the detective.

Inez understood that somebody was concealed behind the couch, and that the revolver, used as a club, was about to descend upon his head with crushing force, and she smiled encouragement toward Carruthers as he raised his hand to strike.

CHAPTER X.

THE ROOM WITH THE SECRET DOOR.

The blow fell.

Had it taken effect with all the force that Carruthers intended, it is doubtful if the detective had lived, and had it even struck him fairly, he would instantly have been stunned and senseless.

But because of the position in which he was lying, with his head almost under the edge of the couch, and also the position in which Carruthers was standing, almost directly over him, the blow could not be fairly dealt, and therefore, instead of falling with crushing force on the back of his head, it landed with a glancing touch, and crashed onward against the floor, where the butt of the weapon was shivered into fragments.

As it was, however, the force of the blow staggered the detective.

But it did not deprive him of his senses; and as he turned, dazed and almost unconscious from the effects of it, his own arms encountered the legs of the master criminal above him, and realizing that he had seized the man who had struck him, Nick used all the strength that was left to him in an effort to pull him down.

In that effort he succeeded—and succeeded so well that Carruthers, who had seized upon the curtains to save himself from falling, dragged them with him to the floor.

And so it was that Carruthers and the curtains fell on top of Nick, and, for a moment, buried him so completely out of sight that the others who rushed to his assistance did not, for a moment, comprehend who the victim of the assault might be.

But they were in doubt only for an instant.

The first terrible effect of the blow upon the detective was past.

The dazed uncertainty of things fled from his senses the moment he seized Carruthers' legs and realized that he had something tangible to combat against.

As Carruthers fell upon him, tangled in the curtain as he was, Nick managed to get one hand through the folds of the drapery and thus to seize Carruthers by the throat.

With one hand seizing him, he speedily got the other into action also, and thus, almost as the master criminal struck the floor, he was involved in a plight nearly as bad as the detective's.

Nor was Carruthers slow in continuing his own attack.

He saw instantly that the full effect of his blow with the pistol had failed; but he was conscious of his own great strength, and also that help was at hand.

In an instant the couch was kicked away from the wall, and the two struggling forms were out almost to the center of the room.

But a fight like that could not be of long duration.

The man called Pancho had leaped forward at the first instant of attack, and he added his own great strength to that of Carruthers in the effort to subdue the detective.

Nor was Inez inactive.

She, also, leaped toward the scene of the conflict, and as she did so, she seized from the table a smaller and lighter weapon than that which Carruthers had used, but nevertheless one that was heavy enough to inflict a severe blow.

Then, as the two men seized upon Nick Carter, who had almost gained his feet, and bore him to the floor again, she leaned over him, and raising the weapon in her hand, brought it down with a sudden sharp blow directly above his right temple.

The result was what might be expected.

Nick Carter groaned. His head fell back. His arms loosed their hold upon his assailants, and he lapsed into unconsciousness.

Inez straightened herself up and laughed.

"What would you do without me?" she asked. "There, Morris, lies your enemy. Bind him while you have time, and bind him securely. We will consider afterward what is best to do with him—unless you

think you had rather put an end to him at once," and she laughed again.

Carruthers was adjusting his collar, but he stopped instantly and leaned forward.

"We can find the things to tie him with in his own pockets," he said: and presently he held up several pairs of handcuffs to their view.

To snap one pair of them on the detective's wrists and another pair on his ankles was the work of a second only.

"There!" he exclaimed. "That is what I would call be caught in his own brambles: eh? I hope he will come around soon. I want to have a chat with him; I do, really."

Inez had turned away from them and started to cross the room; but she came to an abrupt halt and uttered a little cry of alarm.

"What's the matter?" demanded Panchi.

"What is it?" exclaimed Carruthers.

"The boy!" she cried. "Patsy! Where is he? He has escaped!"

A quick survey of the room told them that she had spoken the truth, and the wide-open door which communicated with the hallway explained which way he had gone.

"Quick!" exclaimed Inez. "After him!"

"Halt!" cried Carruthers. "Here, both of you! I'll take command now. Help me with Carter. We must get him through into the next house and close the secret door. They can never find it in a thousand years. Let Patsy go. He can do no harm."

He did not see that Nick Carter's eyes were wide open, and that when he turned in that direction the detective closed them again, in a semblance of unconsciousness.

With a quick motion, Carruthers kicked aside the chairs which still stood in their way, and then calling Panchi to his side with an imperative motion, he signed to him to take the detective's feet while he himself took him by the shoulders.

But as they lifted him from the floor the flush which had crimsoned in the detective's cheeks told him that Nick was no longer insensible of what was taking place, and he dropped him on the floor again with a thud.

"Open your eyes, Carter," he said. "You are conscious all right."

"Well?" said Nick. "What of it?"

"I'll make terms with you, if you care to do so."

"I don't." replied Nick, shortly.

"Then I'll kill you."

"All right. Kill away."

"By Heaven! I am more than half inclined to take you at your word," muttered Carruthers, and he drew from one of his pockets the mate to the weapon with which he had first struck Nick Carter down.

Nick's eyes did not falter.

He gazed intently into Carruthers' eyes, while the latter slowly raised the hammer of his weapon, and pointed the muzzle of it at the detective's head.

For an instant it seemed as if he was about to fire, and thus to end the career of the great detective; but even as his finger was pressing against the trigger, a hand was stretched out and rested on his arm.

"Not now," said the low voice of Inez Navarre. "Wait."

"Thank you, Inez," said Nick. "I'll remember that act in your favor, when the tables are turned against you. You saved my life that time. I won't forget it."

"You are right she did," said Carruthers. "You are, really, for I should have killed you, in another second, Carter. Much as I adore you, much as I respect your wonderful ability, I should have deprived the inspector of your able assistance. I would do it yet, if it were not for making Inez an accessory to your murder.

"Come!" he added, turning to the others. "We waste time. That kid will be back here presently with half the police force at his back."

"You are right he will," said Nick.

"When he comes," remarked Carruthers, smilingly, "he won't find anything to interest him, or his companions."

He bent forward to again take the detective by his arms, in order to carry him, and at the same instant

Pancho leaned forward in his place to seize the detective's feet.

And then the unexpected happened.

It will be remembered that Nick Carter's feet and wrists were shackled with his own irons, and in that one fact existed the secret of the next act.

It was by no means the first time that the detective had fallen in combat, and neither was this his first experience in having his own handcuffs employed against him. With a certain class of criminals that sort of thing was considered a great joke, and Nick had provided against just such a contingency.

Every pair of handcuffs he possessed was provided with a secret spring, so arranged that it afforded no opportunity of being touched by accident, but was entirely easy to work if one were only aware of its locality and utility.

Thus it was that when Carruthers seized him by the shoulders to raise him from the floor he touched with one of his fingers the secret spring of the irons on his wrists, and as the shackles dropped from him he shot his right fist into the face of Carruthers, who was bending over him.

The blow was a powerful one, and Carruthers staggered back and fell to the floor from the effects of it.

At the selfsame instant, Nick threw himself backward again, and so kicked with both feet at once.

The toes of his boots—both of them—came in sudden contact with Pancho's chin, for he was also leaning forward, prepared to seize the detective's feet; and he also reeled backward and fell to the floor.

The two acts of the detective were so nearly simultaneous that the men struck the floor almost at the same instant; and as they did so Nick raised his body again, and with wonderful quickness managed to reach the secret spring in the irons that held his ankles.

Instantly he was free; and also instantly he leaped to his feet.

But the fraction of time he had required to free his feet from the shackles, although infinitesimal almost, was nevertheless also taken advantage of by Carruthers.

He had no sooner struck the floor than he leaped up again, and so it happened that he and Nick Carter resumed upright positions at exactly the same instant of time.

That Carruthers did not fear the combat was instantly evident.

With a muttered curse he flung himself full upon the detective, and he did it so suddenly that Nick had no opportunity to strike out with his fists.

All he could do was to fight after the manner in which he was attacked, which was to seize his adversary around the body and attempt to throw him to the floor.

He realized even as he did so that he would stand but small chance of victory with Pancho and Inez in the room, but he was resolved to make a fight of it for all that.

He knew that Inez still had the pistol with which she had struck him on the head during the first part of the struggle, before the irons had been placed on his hands and feet; and he had not a doubt that Pancho was also armed.

And so they seized each other.

What the final outcome of that terrific struggle might have been, had there been no interruption of any kind, can never be determined, although it is safe to say that, powerful as Nick Carter was, it is more than likely that it would have gone hard with him in the face of such overwhelming odds.

But there did come an interruption.

At the very instant when he and Carruthers became locked together in the struggle, a shout came from the foot of the stairs—a shout which the detective recognized as belonging to Patsy, and he knew that help was at hand.

The others in that room knew it, too.

Carruthers knew it. Pancho and Inez knew it.

And Pancho and Inez did exactly the only thing they could do under the circumstances—they glanced into each other's faces, and then, with Pancho leading the way, they made a break for the secret door behind the couch.

But, as short a time as they had in which to act, it was evident that Inez did not relish the idea of leaving a friend in the predicament in which Carruthers was at that moment.

She thrust one hand into her bosom, and drew it forth with a small but wicked-looking dagger in her grasp.

Then, even as the voices on the stairs drew nearer—when, indeed, they were almost at the door of the room—she darted toward Nick Carter and drove the weapon into his side.

Without waiting to witness the effect of her blow, she turned then and fled to the now open secret entrance through which Pancho had already escaped; and she reached it just as Patsy, closely followed by Chick, leaped into the room.

Even then she turned, as if in expectation that Carruthers was following her.

But she saw that Nick Carter had not fallen. She saw that the blow which she had believed would kill him had taken little or no effect, and that he was fighting on with his opponent as desperately as ever.

Realizing that she could do no more if she hoped to escape she turned and disappeared through the secret door, closing it after her, just as Chick sent a bullet crashing against the steel of which it was composed.

But Chick did not stop when he fired.

He leaped on into the room, toward the two struggling men, and in another instant he would have taken a hand in the game.

But Nick Carter did not need assistance at that particular moment.

Even as Chick ran toward him he lifted the heavy form of Carruthers high in the air, and then, with a heroic effort, threw the body from him against the side wall of the building, as you or I, reader, might have thrown a two-year-old child.

And Carruthers struck the wall with an impact that was awful.

The thud of the body against the plaster might have been heard all over the house; and when he dropped to the floor he remained there as motionless as if he were dead, save for a slight twitching and quivering of the muscles.

"Tie him up, Patsy," said Nick. "Use the picture wires. They won't break or unlock. I'll take him to headquarters myself this time. Where are the others?"

Chick answered him from behind the couch.

"They appear to have escaped through the solid wall," he said. "There was a door here when I entered the room, but it seems to have disappeared now."

"Let it go, Chick; and let them go with it. I'll take up their case later. We've got the master criminal here, and I propose to hang onto him, if I have to take him to Sing Sing myself. Where did you come from, Chick? I thought you were out at the end of Long Island."

"Silas Landgrove brought us into town rather unexpectedly," replied Chick. "We arrived at three o'clock, and he made directly for this house, I imagine. That is, I think he was aiming for here; but he stopped in an all-night place to get a drink. I was waiting outside for him to come out when Patsy ran into me. We didn't lose any time in getting back here."

During the search of the house which took place the following day, it was found to be a sort of general storehouse for stolen goods, and the heavy package which Nick had heard Pancho deposit on the floor of the hall that night was the proceeds of a burglary he had just committed.

The secret door was also discovered; but that is another story.

THE END.

Next week's issue, No. 411, will contain "The Criminal Queen's Oath; or, The Difference Between Two." In this story you will find that Nick Carter was brought face to face with Inez Navarro in one of the greatest fights of his life. In it also you will learn of Carme Navarro, the beautiful woman who saved the life of the great detective.

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